

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CORRECTIONS

PUBLIC HEARING

November 9, 2006

The Honorable,
The Board of Commissioners of Cook County

ATTENDANCE

Present: Chairman Maldonado, Vice Chairman Silvestri, Commissioners Butler, Gorman, Moreno, Peraica and Quigley (7)

Absent: None (0)

Also Present: Zelda Whitler – Undersheriff, Office of the Sheriff

Court Reporter: Barbara Small, C.P.R.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Your Committee on Law Enforcement and Corrections of the Board of Commissioners of Cook County met pursuant to notice on Thursday, November 9, 2006, at the hour of 10:00 A.M. in the Board Room, Room 569, County Building, 118 North Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois.

Your Committee has considered the following item and upon adoption of this report, the recommendations are as follows:

276232 A RESOLUTION REQUESTING THE COOK COUNTY SHERIFF IMPLEMENT AN OFFENDER WATCH SYSTEM WITH AN AUTOMATIC E-MAIL ALERT CAPABILITY (PROPOSED RESOLUTION). Submitting a Proposed Resolution sponsored by Joseph Mario Moreno, John H. Stroger, Jr., President, Jerry Butler, Forrest Claypool, Earlean Collins, John P. Daley, Elizabeth Ann Doody Gorman, Gregg Goslin, Carl R. Hansen, Roberto Maldonado, Joan Patricia Murphy, Anthony J. Peraica, Mike Quigley, Peter N. Silvestri, Deborah Sims, Bobbie L. Steele and Larry Suffredin, County Commissioners.

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, 80-95% of sexual assault victims know their attacker; and

WHEREAS, 50% of sex offenders re-offend; and

WHEREAS, 45% of sexual assault victims are under 12 years of age; and

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WHEREAS, at least half of convicted child molesters report that they also have sexually assaulted an adult; and

WHEREAS, more than half of rape/sexual assaults happen within one mile of the victim's home; and

WHEREAS, 80% of all addresses have at least one offender within a mile; and

WHEREAS, sex offenders cross socio-economic boundaries, living in both the richest and poorest of neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS, Illinois State statute sets a provision for a Sheriff's office to register offenders and notify the public; and

WHEREAS, offenders are very mobile, with 25% moving each year; and

WHEREAS, the new offender population increases by a rate of 10% annually; and

WHEREAS, online alert systems are available, which not only allow a citizen to look up registered offenders in their area, but to receive an email alert, followed by a postcard when a registered sex offender moves to within one mile of sensitive addresses, such as a home, school, park, etc.; and

WHEREAS, a web-based offender watch system will also permit one to conduct address searches that will create a map showing all offenders within one mile of the address, as well as a geographic risk assessment of the offenders; and

WHEREAS, this program will also allow for city and name searches, as well as provide detailed descriptions on offenders including: name, aliases, physical description, photograph, nature of conviction and a map of the offender's address; and

WHEREAS, this program is an important tool that will enable one to attain this necessary knowledge to help keep our children and families safe and at a relatively low cost; and

WHEREAS, it is in the interest of everyone to help protect our children from this seemingly ever increasing danger.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Cook County Board of Commissioners does hereby request that the Cook County Sheriff's web site implement an Offender Watch system with an automatic email alert capability, which will assist in informing our residents where sexual offenders reside and thereby giving them, in a timely manner, the information they need to protect their families and reduce the chance of future victimization.

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***Referred to the Committee on Law Enforcement and Corrections on March 1, 2006. Approved as amended on September 14, 2006. Withdrawn from the agenda on September 19, 2006.**

Chairman Maldonado stated that Item 276232, which was approved at the September 14, 2006 Law Enforcement and Corrections meeting, was withdrawn at the September 19, 2006 Board Meeting in order that this public hearing could be held.

Commissioner Moreno stated that some of the public speakers will be sharing valuable experience which they possess in implementing victim alert systems.

Zelda Whitler, Undersheriff, Office of the Sheriff, delivered the following remarks: While the concept behind this Ordinance is admirable, she is uncertain whether the Sheriff's Office has the necessary funds to commit to implement this Ordinance, given the budget cuts which the Sheriff's Office will sustain this year. Another concern is that the information that will be utilized in the implementation of this Ordinance will be obtained from the Illinois State Police, and may be inaccurate. Additionally, this Ordinance may create liability for the County. She would like to examine this Ordinance more closely to determine how the Sheriff's Office could have greater control. Her office has met with Commissioner Moreno's office as well as with the State's Attorney's Office and with Cathy Maras-O'Leary. Currently, the Sheriff's Office accesses data from the Illinois State Police and provides a website where a citizen can determine which registered sex offenders live in their area. The State's Attorney's Office also has a victim alert program. She would like to involve more people to determine the greater impact of this Ordinance.

Chairman Maldonado inquired what the cost of this program would be.

Ms. Whitler replied: She cannot provide that information at this time. However, the State's Attorney's victim notification program notifies 17,000 victims and costs \$250,000. The majority of these victims prefer to be notified by phone; also, not everyone has access to e-mail.

Commissioner Butler voiced his concern that people who committed lesser offenses or unwisely plea bargained would be unfairly stigmatized by this Ordinance. He read part of a letter submitted by Jo Anne Smith, LCSW, and requested that it be entered into the record. (See attachment.)

Commissioner Moreno stated: Software does exist that would enable the County to alert victims. Two of the main issues are timeliness and accuracy. The implementation of this Ordinance would require a collective effort of all the police departments in Cook County supervised by the Sheriff's Office in conjunction with the State's Attorney's Office. Of particular importance would be the input of those organizations that already have a victim alert system in place.

Chairman Maldonado asked the Secretary to the Board to call on the following registered public speakers:

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- 1) Cara Smith – Policy Director, Illinois Attorney General's Office
- 2) Shauna Boliker – Chief, Sex Crimes Division, Cook County State's Attorneys Office
- 3) Trevor Peterson – Director of Government Relations, Chicago Children's Advocacy Center
- 4) George Blakemore – Concerned Citizen

Commissioner Moreno moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Butler. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Committee on Law Enforcement and
Corrections

Roberto Maldonado, Chairman

Attest:

Michelle Harris, Secretary

The transcript for this meeting is available in the Office of the Secretary to the Board, 118 North Clark Street, Room 567, Chicago, IL 60602.